



Parent Page

How Can You Be Involved in School Improvement?

Winter 2007

NRCLD developed this brief to help you determine how you can be involved in efforts to improve education at your son's or daughter's school.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), signed into law in December 2004, cited low expectations for student success and a lack of solid research practices in teaching and learning for children with disabilities as roadblocks in fulfilling the hopes expressed in previous IDEA legislation. Important changes have been made in IDEA 2004 that can help your child's success in school. It's important to know how you can be involved.

With IDEA 2004, Congress is attempting to raise expectations and the use of scientifically proven educational research methods to remove these two roadblocks. Will they? That would be great, but that's down the road. What you can do now is enhance your knowledge about what changes are or should be happening at your school.

"When the music changes, so does the dance." That's an African proverb to heed because the music—IDEA—has changed and so should educational practices at your child's school. Within your child's school, you should anticipate higher expectations for all students. Those high expectations should be shared by school district staff, school administration, the classroom

teacher, you, and the student. Since administrators and teachers are being held more accountable for student success, you should expect to see research-based education methods that can be measured.

These education methods should include scientifically based instruction and more school-wide screening to make sure students receive the instruction they need to achieve in their learning programs. This focus on knowledge gained in the classroom rather than scores on a state or national test given once a year carries more weight in assessing and guiding student progress. For example, if a student fails to achieve, in spite of appropriate scientifically based instruction (such as that in the responsiveness to intervention method), then a disability may be suspected.

Parents can ask educators...

- What scientifically based practices are used in core academic areas?
- What school-wide screening measures are in place?
- What measures are used to monitor students' progress in core academic areas?
- What early intervening services are available for students who may be at risk for learning difficulties?
- What method does this school use to determine whether a student has a learning disability?

This school-wide screening should reduce the numbers of students classified as having a disability or “learning disability.” In the past, only those students who qualified as having a disability were able to receive special educational and behavioral services. However, some experts found too many students unnecessarily got this label. Also, too many students of certain races or ethnic backgrounds were determined to have disabilities in comparison to the whole student population.

Although the definition of specific learning disability hasn’t changed from IDEA 1997 to IDEA 2004, how a student is identified—the school’s eligibility and evaluation process—may change. Knowing that IDEA 2004 does allow for more flexible learning disability assessments, measurable goals, more support in the general education classroom, continuous progress monitoring, scientifically proven instructional methods, and early intervening services for at-risk students helps you understand what to expect and request.

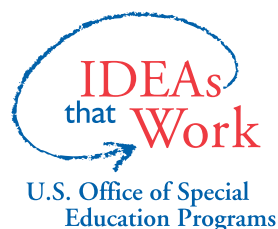
Stay informed, too, of your child’s progress, the school’s educational methods, and IDEA 2004 required practices by talking with other parents and parent advocacy groups. You also can learn more from national educational organizations and research organizations, including the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, which conducts research on the identification of learning disabilities and makes recommendations on putting

educational research methods into practice. The following are just a few organizations that may be helpful in providing additional information:

- **Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (PACER Center)**
Web site: <http://www.taalliance.org>
- **Learning Disability Association of America (LDA)**
Web site: <http://www.ldaamerica.us/>
- **LD Online**
Web site: <http://www.ldonline.org/>
- **National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)**
Web site: <http://www.ld.org/>
- **SchwabLearning.org**
Web site: <http://www.schwablearning.org/>

If changes are not going on at your school, then you may need to start asking questions. The more you know about IDEA 2004, the better prepared you will be to ask these questions and to understand your rights and responsibilities.

Maybe the biggest preparation you can do in this time of change is to raise your own expectations about your child’s academic and behavioral success. Having higher expectations will help you get through the coming changes because any change, even one for the better, comes with some discomforts and issues to resolve.



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